

The Kansas Educational Leadership Institute: Mentoring Educational Leaders in Partnership

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Leadership matters and sustaining mentoring programs for new educational leaders is critical. This article will provide a brief historical accounting leading to the planning and development of the Kansas Educational Leadership Institute through collaborative partnerships in the state. Guiding leadership standards and professional licensure requirements propelling the need for continued mentoring support of new superintendents, special education directors, and principals will be discussed. Literature will support the critical role of mentoring in developing leadership knowledge as new skills are applied on-the-job in the first years of practice. Experienced and trained KELI mentors understand the importance of solid relationships, an individualized approach, and establishing professional networks to foster growth and move theory to practice. KELI's operational structure and program components will be described; demonstrated through clear expectations, careful matching, and a responsive approach to field-based needs. Field practitioners designed KELI and showcase mentoring practices that help newly positioned educational leaders understand who they are and the impact of their decisions. KELI is gold accredited by the International Mentoring Association and is considered the premier mentoring program for new educational leaders in Kansas. KELI's impact is evidenced by 13 years of state-wide program participation data and annual perception survey data highlighting programmatic effectiveness in supporting new educational leaders in Kansas.

Keywords: mentoring, educational leadership, superintendent, principal

Introduction

The Kansas Educational Leadership Institute (KELI) plays a pivotal role in building professional networks and mentoring that fosters professional growth in PK-12 educational environments. A culture of collaboration through state-wide partners is a hallmark of KELI. Partnerships include the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE), Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB), United School Administrators (USA-Kansas), and Kansas State University (KSU). These partnership organizations form a steering committee, providing on-going leadership, in-kind resources, and funding through allocated and grant funding. A second tier of governance is an appointed field-based advisory committee, that provides feedback on program quality and mentee needs.

In 2011, collaborative efforts among state organizations and state leaders resulted in moving the vision for KELI to implementation at the superintendent level. A shared vision among state education leadership organizations recognized that leadership matters and when leaders better understand how they are doing, they impact the performance of others in meaningful ways (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). This acknowledgement became a driving force and ambition to provide quality mentoring and professional development at the executive school leadership level. A full documentary of state efforts and stakeholder

involvement in the innovative leadership development and beginning of KELI is available in a special edition of Educational Considerations (Funk, 2013).

The need for an innovative, field-based response to build an induction and mentoring program for superintendents in their first two years of practice, along with professional development, resulted in on-going conversations with state education leadership organizations and included recommendations to support these goals. Putting the right stakeholders at the table and gathering critical feedback on the needs of new superintendents and recommendations for program structure resulted in specific and actionable steps enacting partner support. Partnership planners focused on building capacity in new superintendents, by experienced Kansas superintendents serving as mentors, and purposeful opportunities to participate in regional and state-wide leadership professional networks. KELI establishes effective and trusting mentee/mentor relationships through individualized on-site visits, performance observations, monthly checklists, cohort sessions, and professional learning. In a review of studies, Lochmiller (2021) noted that developing strong interpersonal relationships is essential to effective mentoring. Tschannem-Moran (2014) affirms the importance of trust as key in relationships that permit vulnerability, honesty, and reliability. Planning continued for

mentoring of other leadership positions, resulting in mentoring and induction for building principals beginning in 2013-14 and mentoring and induction for special education administrators in 2015-16. KELI continues to support and provide mentor services for superintendents, principals, and special education directors in this model.

Leadership Standards Guide the Work

Developing meaningful mentoring programs for new education leaders is vital. Sustaining mentoring programs is equally important to support today's complex educational leadership environments and provides a continuum to formal leadership preparation. The National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Program Standards for Building and District Leadership serve as a conceptual framework (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2018) complimented by guidance requiring mentoring for all leadership positions in a state approved program to attain professional licensure in Kansas (Kansas State Department of Education, 2022). KELI mentors guide mentees in exploring the importance of mission, equity, cultural responsiveness, instructional leadership, community engagement, management, and professional norms encompassed in the NELP standards (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2018). Mentors blend experiences in mentoring conversations with clear expectations for inclusive practices and promotion of what leaders should know, believe, and be able to do as outlined in the standards. When mentors effectively articulate the essence of standards that define practice, mentees can better develop knowledge and beliefs that extend into their performance to reach agreed upon goals. KELI mentors move interchangeably between support, guidance, and advice while modeling transparency and open communication. They share tools from experience and pinpoint essential resources for new superintendents and principals that aid in the professional growth of mentees. KELI mentors are vividly aware of the critical role of these benchmark standards, providing research-based evidence of what principals and superintendents demonstrate in practice. Rhodes and Fletcher (2013) noted that educational leaders are more adept in reflecting on their decisions because of mentoring. A focus on building leadership capacity also contributes to retaining qualified educational leaders. Peer mentoring by experienced and trained leaders provides consistent and nuanced application of these standards in action in the KELI model as mentees and mentors embrace the potential of their leadership at the local school and district level.

The role and responsibilities of educational leaders are complex. The principal's role "has become more difficult, and the job expectations have become more ambitious" (National Association of Elementary Schools Principals, 2003, p. 7). Given the responsibility of leadership

in the overall success of schools, districts should avoid allowing new position leaders to be "thrown into their jobs without a lifejacket" if they are to stand any reasonable chance of succeeding in their increasingly challenging positions (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2003, p. 8). Grissom et al. (2021) advocate that mentoring must move "beyond a buddy system that merely helps new leaders adapt to a flawed system, to one whose core goal is to help prepare a new generation of educational leaders willing and able to challenge the status quo and lift the quality of teaching and learning in every school" (pp. 3-4). Mentoring for new superintendents, who feel isolated and are tasked with complex political and fiscal responsibilities, helps beginning district leaders grow, form meaningful networks, and survive the learning curve (Blad, 2023). These increasing demands are combined with a shortage of competent candidates who lack the necessary experience to move into administrative positions. Mentoring can address superintendent turnover and help school districts lessen the adjustment new leadership often brings (Blad, 2023). Balancing the challenges of a new leadership role and set of responsibilities necessitates the development of mentoring programs for first and second-year school and district leaders to enhance critical leadership skills (Bertrand et al., 2018). KELI offers a year one and year two program for each program level: superintendent, principal, special education, and respective assistant positions for each level. Bertrand et al. (2018) confirmed the value of a two-year program as sufficient to help new mentees adjust to a new school and district settings. It is more important than ever to embrace opportunities to differentiate mentoring, reflect on leadership practices based on standards, and prioritize recruitment, training, and support to entry-level leaders.

Coach Training for Mentors

KELI mentors often possess like-experiences and are respected in their field; however, coaching training for mentors builds skills and necessary strategies to support new principals and superintendents as they migrate from leadership preparation to practice. Building professional capacity is at the forefront of KELI's vision; therefore, all mentors must participate in coaching training up to three years and refresher training every five years to acquire a mindset focused on promoting growth in their mentees. These experienced state leaders serve as peer mentors and participate in training on coaching to build skills in the following ways: (1) asking powerful questions by probing and clarifying; (2) paraphrasing to build understanding; (3) being an active listener; (4) providing opportunities for reflective feedback; (5) exhibiting positive intent; and (6) establishing mentee personal and professional goals (Cheliotis & Reilly, 2018). KELI's coaching training includes completing an on-line course that aligns with

“Coaching Conversations: Transforming your school one conversation at a time” (Cheliotes & Reilly, 2018). Community calls and practice labs are also part of the coaching training. In practice labs, mentors apply and practice coaching skills in a safe and confidential setting to address current day issues as coach/client/observer. As mentors model coaching as a leadership skill, mentees also grow in their reflective practice and mentors grow professionally in their role.

Research indicates coaching can improve leadership practice and address personal learning goals (Lochmiller, 2018). Rhodes and Fletcher (2013) examined the support of leadership coaches working with school principals. When challenges were first discussed with trained coaches, principals more clearly communicated issues and suggested solutions that teachers and staff received more positively. In this way, experienced mentors assisted new school and district leaders by helping them plan and reflect on their decisions. Through mentoring, educational leaders can enhance their reflective practices, improve their leadership capabilities, and remain committed to their roles, strengthening the educational system (Rhodes & Fletcher, 2013). Lochmiller (2021) noted the following:

Coaching for improvement is not generic in its orientation but rather bound to particularized understanding of what educators do to support instruction and learning. As such, the context shapes what coaches must know and what support they must provide to compel specific practice-based changes. Coaching for improvement might be thought of as a mechanism that connect[s] organizational improvement priorities with specific practice-based change. (p. 394)

Skilled mentors possess a keen understanding of how to best frame issues related to individual stakeholders, the school, and the organization that benefits what mentees consider as they finalize decisions impacting their local school and district settings.

Quality Alignment with Mentoring Standards

KELI is gold accredited by the International Mentoring Association (IMA) (International Mentoring Association, 2023). KELI’s alignment to the IMA mentoring standards, established by experts, are an indication of a quality, sustained program and a mark of excellence. The application for accreditation includes an executive summary outlining program goals and objectives. The scope of the mentoring program seeking accreditation must be clear along with a description of the organization’s accomplishments. Other vital components of the accreditation process include: 1) description of personnel and program structure; 2) evidence of sufficient fiscal resources that

guide and support program goals; 3) induction and establishment of mentors including evidence of screening and identification of mentors, assessment of mentor strengths, assessment of mentees’ needs, matching process, and mentor orientation; 4) monitoring process for identifying and addressing barriers; 5) evidence of mentoring support and monitoring of mentee/mentor relationships; and 6) program evaluation to provide data on program goals and objectives. Interviews with program representatives are also conducted. KELI has held gold accreditation since 2017 and will continue to seek reaccreditation. Accreditation provides high quality evidence of KELI’s sustained impact over time.

Program Operation

KELI’s program structure was set by original programmers and is reviewed annually by KELI’s governance committees which include a partnership-based steering committee and field-based advisory committee. KELI establishes a fee structure for district’s enrolling new leaders for mentoring support and a fee structure to reimburse mentors according to program type. As recommended by our state educational partners, retired superintendents serve as mentors to first and second-year superintendents. Special education and building mentors are typically practicing district and school leaders. A process for selection of mentors at each program level is in place. District program mentors apply and are vetted by the KELI executive director. Building program mentors and mentees must have the support of their superintendent to serve as a mentor or participate in the program as a mentee. Each mentor has outlined scope of work agreements and mentors provide documentation of their visits and other required information on monthly logs. Recruitment and enrollment of new mentees occurs annually and is a combined effort of new leaders seeking enrollment in KELI and active communication with the field about KELI’s mentoring program. KELI staff work diligently in matching mentees and mentors at all program levels, often working with state partners and reaching out to field contacts for recommendations and assistance. Each mentee and mentor are carefully matched with consideration of experiences and qualifications important to understanding the mentee and their school district. Mentors are carefully matched for geographic proximity, school district size, and demographic characteristics. Matches also consider experience specific to the newly positioned leader/mentor. Research supports novice leaders needing experienced mentors with credibility, skills, and similar experiences. Bertrand et al. (2018) found that “prior experience of the mentor assigned to the mentee...to be important in building a relationship” (p. 87). In Bertrand et al.’s study (2018), “proximity of the mentor was viewed as an important factor” (p. 87). Mentee leadership growth occurred when mentors were “able to

actually visit the mentor on his/her campus and to meet face-to-face for consultation sessions” (Bertrand et al., 2018, p. 87). In addition, Bertrand et al. (2018) commented that having external mentors provides an outside view that is important to helping mentees “understand their role in goal setting and collaboration skills. The outside view promote[s] more honest communication as [mentees] sometimes struggle with a particular problem” (p. 91).

Best practices and critical attributes of KELI’s operations include a program designed by state field practitioners and program leadership that maintains a constant pulse and responsive approach to meet the needs of the field. Program staff have regular communication with the field and market key aspects of the program to state audiences at conferences and other leadership meetings. An annual orientation is held each August to welcome all program mentees and mentors with an emphasis on networking, conversation on essential topics, and professional learning on current issues. A log of annual KELI activities showcases the work and connections with the field. Sound fiscal and compliance end-of-year procedures are retained for the program. In addition, KELI maintains thriving recognition at the state, national, and international levels.

Findings

Sustainable Program Model

According to state educational partners and on-going survey data, KELI’s program model has sustained highly effective practices and leads the way for building capacity in new school district leaders in the state. Strong partnership relationships are paramount to KELI’s success and ongoing, responsive, and helpful communication has earned KELI respect in the field. Program requirements outline clear expectations in format and frequency important to complete KELI’s program components. Meaningful relationships and problem-solving support to KELI mentors guide quality interactions and decisions to define and support meaningful professional learning for mentors.

Program accountability documents outline the clear expectations for KELI mentee program completion requirements. Program requirements are specific to each program level and provide the pathway to gain professional leadership licensure in the state through a required documentation of program completion form. The primary focus of support for mentees is face-to-face, on-site mentoring by experienced and trained Kansas like-positioned leaders. Mentoring is contextualized by visits to the mentee’s school or district and additional support through varied and timely communication (i.e., video conferencing platforms, phone, email, text). This individualized mentoring approach is differentiated to meet the needs and build capacity in each mentee and is

essential for the confidential work of a school principal, special education administrator, and district superintendent. Well-respected leaders form meaningful relationships and establish a safe and trusting environment. Mentors lead mentees in setting annual goals and encourage regular reflection on their decisions and practices. Monthly checklists are reviewed by mentors and are provided to new leaders prior to each month to facilitate discussion around upcoming tasks, required reports, and important leadership responsibilities and considerations for each position. Mentors provide confidential feedback to mentees on two performance observations, jointly selected by the mentee/mentor. Examples of performance observations could be attending a board of education meeting or an all-staff in-service. Specific attendance at state-wide meetings important to each position are also detailed in program requirements. KELI’s year two program allows for a customized approach to mentee defined special projects or organizational goals.

Networking and professional learning are key to the mentees’ experience in KELI. Regional cohort meetings hosted by a state partner leadership organization build professional relationships, knowledge of state-wide resources, and professional learning on critical topics. Special position cohort groups are held when the needs of mentees warrant (i.e., assistant superintendent or year two cohort meetings). Regional and state leadership conferences and other workshops are communicated to mentees who select professional learning events that meet their needs. Additional resources to address other current issues facing leaders are provided as field-based needs are articulated. KELI strives to build capacity in each new leader by allowing the mentee to understand who they are as a leader and how their decisions manifest in their local context to make a difference for student learning and success. KELI’s mentors are the heart of the program.

Impact - Service to the Field

KELI’s program vitality is fueled by strong connections to the field and response to meeting the needs of new principals and superintendents. This is accomplished through regularly occurring dialogue and feedback from program mentors. District level superintendent and special education mentors meet and collaborate with KELI staff up to four times annually to provide essential input on program components, mentee needs, and recommendations. Guest speakers often attend mentor meetings to ensure accurate and informative updates to mentors serving the field. Building level principal mentors meet bi-annually with KELI staff to plan and reflect on KELI program requirements and needs of building leaders. Current service numbers are presented by program in the following sections that detail KELI’s ongoing impact and service to the field.

Table 1
KELI Perception Survey History

Survey Year	Building Mentors & Mentees	District Mentors & Mentees	Superintendent Mentors & Mentees	Special Education Mentors & Mentees
2023-24	X		X	X
2022-23	X		X	X
	Year 1 and Year 2			
2021-22	X		X	X
			District split 2 groups	
2020-21	X	X		
*Pandemic questions added to all surveys	Year 1 and Year 2	Year 1 and Year 2		
2019-20	X	X		
2018-19	X	X		
*Pilot Survey w/PSEL Standards				

Superintendent Program

In 2011-12, KELI began mentoring first-year superintendents and since then has mentored 293 new superintendents, with 56 participating in the year two program, as the year two program is optional for second-year superintendents. KELI has mentored 67 first-year assistant superintendents with eight assistant superintendents joining during year two. This is a total of 424 district leaders at the superintendent/assistant superintendent level. KELI also records the number of districts represented each year; 36 districts were represented in 2023-24 and 27 districts are represented in 2024-25. The number of superintendent mentors has ranged from five to 14 over the 13-year span of KELI’s operation. By recommendation of state education leader organizations, superintendent mentors are retired.

Principal Program

KELI began mentoring first-year principals in 2013-14 and to date has mentored 406 new building leaders with 94 joining during year two. The year two program is optional for second-year principals. Assistant principals totaled 245 with 53 participating in year two. This is a total of 798 principals/assistant principals. In 2023-24, 63 districts participated in KELI in Kansas and 61 districts are represented in 2024-25. The number of principal mentors has ranged from 15 to 92 over the 11-years. By design, building principal mentors are practicing in Kansas schools.

Special Education Program

KELI began mentoring special education directors in 2015-16 as license requirements changed in the state. Fifty first-year special education directors have been mentored with 16 enrolling in year two. The year two program is optional for second-year special education directors. KELI has mentored 44 assistant special education directors and seven

enrolled in year two. KELI has mentored 28 special education coordinators. This is a total of 147 new special education leaders in the state. In 2023-24, 14 districts were represented and in 2024-25, 15 districts are represented. The range of special education mentors has been four to 14 over the nine-years of the program. Special education mentors are generally practicing. Total program mentors for KELI since 2011-12 is 826. *Total program mentees for KELI since 2011-12 is 1369.*

Impact – Survey Data for Continuous Improvement

KELI has 13 years of survey data, including a longitudinal history of quantitative data, along with open-ended qualitative response items that allow all program participants to share specific examples of their experiences. Mentors and mentees complete the KELI perception survey on their program experience. The electronic survey is administered annually and is completed at the end-of-year by program participants. The survey contains approximately nine to 15 questions rated on a five-point Likert scale and includes five to seven open-ended questions depending on the group. The history of KELI’s annual perception surveys is provided in Table 1. Selected survey results providing evidence of success and measurable outcomes for the last three years are reflected in Tables 1-3 by program. Longitudinal data are available for each program beginning in the year the specific program was started.

Superintendent Program Survey Highlights

Table 2 provides a snapshot of perception survey data from 2021-24 of superintendent mentees and mentors. Table 2 shows that the overall perceptions of superintendent mentees and mentors for selected questions are strong. In 2021-24, 91% to 100% of superintendent mentees and mentors

Table 2
KELI Superintendent Perception Survey Results

	Superintendents 2021-2022		Superintendents 2022-2023		Superintendents 2023-2024	
	Agree/ Somewhat Agree		Agree/ Somewhat Agree		Agree/ Somewhat Agree	
	Mentor	Mentee	Mentor	Mentee	Mentor	Mentee
Mentor: The frequency of face-to-face mentor interactions met the mentee’s needs.	100%		100%		91%	
Mentee: The frequency of face-to-face mentor interactions met my needs.		95%		100%		100%
Mentor: Interaction with a mentor helped the mentee solve problems.	100%		100%		100%	
Mentee: Interaction with a mentor helped me solve problems.		90%		100%		97%
Mentor: The KELI mentoring program helped mentees grow professionally.	100%		100%		100%	
Mentee: The KELI mentoring program helped me grow professionally.		90%		96%		97%
Mentor: The training provided by KELI for mentors helped me be a more effective mentor-coach.	100%		100%		100%	
Mentee: Cohort meetings were helpful.		95%		100%		94%
Mentor: I was able to form meaningful relationships with my mentee(s).	100%		100%		100%	
Mentee: My KELI mentor developed a strong relationship with me.		95%		100%		100%
Rate the KELI mentoring/induction program as an effective support program for a first-year district leader. (Min =1, Max = 10)	9.88	8.85	9.55	9.2	9.64	8.87

Table 3
KELI Principal Perception Survey Results

	Principals 2021-2022		Principals 2022-2023		Principals 2023-2024	
	Agree/ Somewhat Agree		Agree/ Somewhat Agree		Agree/ Somewhat Agree	
	Mentor	Mentee	Mentor	Mentee	Mentor	Mentee
Mentor: Mentor’s four face-to-face visits to the new leader’s building/office site are an essential component of mentoring.	97%		98%		97%	
Mentee: Mentor’s four face-to-face visits to the new leader’s building/office site are an essential component of mentoring.		87%		90%		90%
Mentor: I apply the professional skills I learn in coaching training sessions as a leader in my own district.	98%		97%		98%	
Mentee: The coaching strengthens my problem-solving skills.		88%		83%		91%
Mentor: I would recommend other first year leaders participate in KELI.	100%		98%		98%	

Mentee: I would recommend other first year leaders participate in the KELI.	94%	90%	94%
Mentor: Overall, I have grown professionally from serving as a KELI mentor.	100%	100%	98%
Mentee: My KELI mentor was willing to adjust when necessary (i.e., scheduling).	96%	99%	95%

Table 4
KELI Special Education Perception Survey Results

	Special Education 2021-2022		Special Education 2022-2023		Special Education 2023-2024	
	Agree/ Somewhat Agree		Agree/ Somewhat Agree		Agree/ Somewhat Agree	
	Mentor	Mentee	Mentor	Mentee	Mentor	Mentee
Mentor: The frequency of face-to-face mentor interactions met the mentee’s needs.	100%		100%		100%	
Mentee: The frequency of face-to-face mentor interactions met my needs.		100%		100%		100%
Mentor: Interaction with a mentor helped the mentee solve problems.	100%		100%		100%	
Mentee: Interaction with a mentor helped me solve problems.		100%		100%		100%
Mentor: The KELI mentoring program helped mentees grow professionally.	100%		100%		100%	
Mentee: The KELI mentoring program helped me grow professionally.		100%		100%		100%
Mentor: The mentor training provided by KELI helped me be a more effective mentor-coach.	100%		100%		100%	
Mentee: KELI Cohort meetings were helpful.		90%		100%		89%
Mentor: I was able to form meaningful relationships with my mentee(s).	100%		100%		100%	
Mentee: My KELI mentor developed a strong relationship with me.		100%		100%		100%
Rate the KELI mentoring/induction program as an effective support program for a first-year district leader. (Min value =1, Max value = 10)	9.56	9.20	10.00	9.67	9.75	9.67

indicated that the frequency of face-to-face interactions met the needs of mentees and rated KELI’s ability to help mentees solve problems with a range of 90%-100%. On a ten-point scale, over the three-year period, superintendent mentors rated the overall effectiveness of KELI for first-year superintendents as 9.55 to 9.88, with mentees rating program effectiveness at 8.85 to 9.20.

Principal Program Survey Highlights

Table 3 provides a snapshot of perception survey data from 2021-24 of building principal mentees and mentors. Table 3 highlights the selected responses from the overall survey of principal mentees and mentors are robust. Ratings of mentees and mentors in the principal program

were positive with 87% to 98% of mentors and mentees indicating that four face-to-face visits were essential and valued. Likewise, 90% to 100% of principal mentors and mentees indicated they would recommend KELI to other first-year principals.

Special Education Program Survey Highlights

Table 4 provides perception survey data from 2021-24 of special education mentees and mentors. Table 4 showcases the overall perceptions of special education mentees and mentors for selected questions are strong. Special education mentees and mentors reported equally compelling ratings in 2021-24. One hundred percent of special

education mentees and mentors indicated that the frequency of face-to-face interactions met the needs of mentees and rated KELI's ability to help mentees solve problems the same. On a ten-point scale, special education mentors and mentees rated the effectiveness of KELI for first-year directors ranging from 9.20 to 10.00.

The KELI program focuses on effective mentoring that moves beyond buddy systems and merely telling new leaders what to do. The overall focus is on building capacity in the new leader and strengthening learning opportunities that allow school and district systems to grow impactful leaders. Robust and clearly defined expectations for mentees and mentors allow relationships to flourish in a spirit of trust and collaboration. KELI's mentors are experienced and successful practitioners who gain specific skills in coaching to help new leaders navigate the complexity of tasks, responsibilities, and situations in today's political environments. This is accomplished by on-site individualized mentoring support that allows mentors to tap into a school/district's culture while learning about important community values and traditions. Survey ratings indicate that mentee and mentor experiences are enriched through additional program components including confidential feedback on mentee-selected performance observations, discussion on monthly checklists outlining key duties, and professional learning occurring in regional and state-wide cohort networks supported by KELI's state partner organizations. Mentees and mentors work together to align professional goals with the school, district, community, and board of education. KELI's 13-year perception survey data validates that the blend of individual coaching with purposeful networking allows mentees to thrive and increase self-efficacy and build confidence. Furthermore, KELI's perception survey data is a key component of program evaluation and continuous improvement that authenticates the gold accreditation achievement by IMA and the high regard KELI has earned by state leaders and the field.

Discussion

In reflecting on the original vision for KELI, past program goals have provided a strong and stable foundation for future growth in expanding the vision for continued innovative leadership development. The birth of KELI originated from collaborative partnerships. KELI continues to grow and flourish from these continued partnerships as state leaders immerse in critical conversations about the role of mentoring and coaching in leadership development from the initial years of practice through the professional learning continuum necessary at each leadership career ladder stage. In a time where retention in leadership is vital, this ongoing focus on support and learning serves as an exciting platform for rich and continuous improvement.

KELI's evidenced-based practices propel new school and district educational leaders to become leaders who grow in their knowledge, increase their understanding of next steps, and lead staff and student learning in meaningful ways. KELI's program structure, responsiveness to field-based needs, and partnership with state-wide leadership organizations and field practitioners continues to allow KELI to make a mark as an exceptional and sustained mentoring program. This program serves as a model demonstrating the impact mentoring can have on building leadership capacity and can inform other professions seeking a program design integrating individualized mentoring and group networking. KELI's service to the field builds individual and collective efficacy in today's educational leaders, who make a difference in leading Kansas schools.

Summary

The KELI program has established a sustainable and highly successful model that allows each participant, mentee and mentor, to think deeply about aspects of mentoring and program components applicable to their individual mentoring goals and initiatives. KELI mentoring is critical to the retention of today's educational leaders in the state of Kansas. KELI's program requirements are reviewed annually through direct conversation and input from state partners and mentors, along with results of perception survey data to recommend program changes to meet the needs of a shifting and diversified leadership landscape. In KELI's model, experienced mentors provide opportunities to discuss sensitive and political issues important to local school and district leaders through the lens and skills of trained coaches.

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